

ISBN 40662
P948

VERTEBRATE PEST CONTROL PROJECT

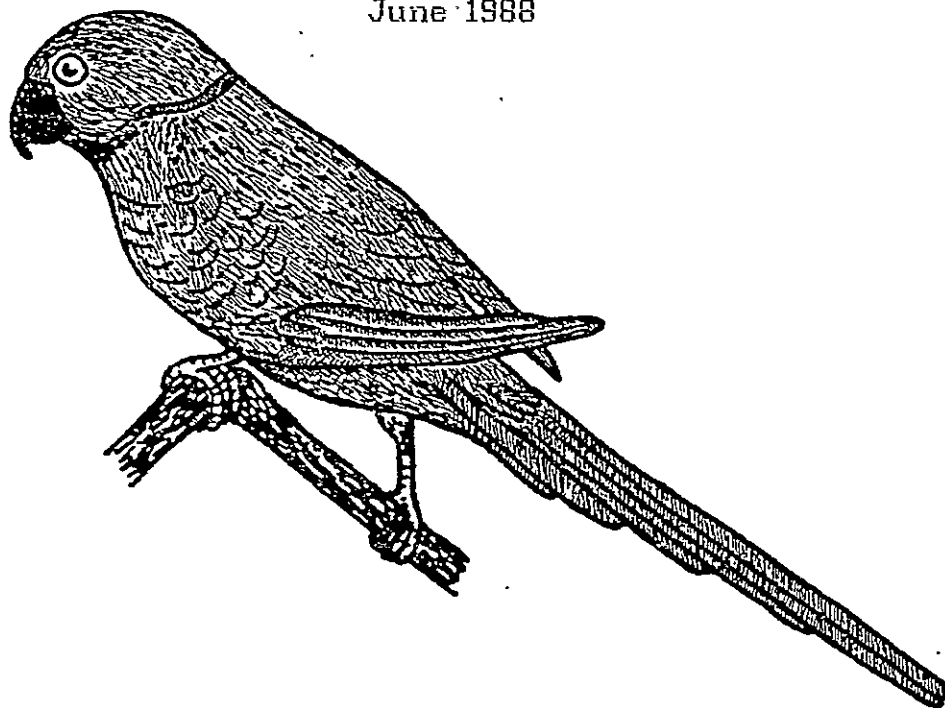


FOOD SECURITY MANAGEMENT POST-HARVEST MANAGEMENT COMPONENT

A PARTIAL RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*Psittacula krameri*)

Technical Report No. 15

June 1988



GOP/USAID/DWRC

National Agricultural Research Centre
Islamabad, Pakistan

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THE ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*PSITTACULA KRAMERI*)

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A Govt. of Pakistan/USAID Project
Vertebrate Pest Control Project
Animal Damage Control
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture

Technical Report No. 15 (Unpublished)

June 1988

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ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET (*PSITTACULA KRAMERI*)

By Joe E. Brooks, Iftikhar Hussain and Ejaz Ahmad*

Identification

Rose-ringed parakeets belong to the Family Psittacidae. Parakeets constitute the largest group of the Order Psittaciformes, which are found in all the tropical regions of the world. The species *Psittacula krameri* is divided into four subspecies, depending upon distribution:

P.k. krameri - distributed in Western Africa from Guinea, Senegal and southernmost regions of Mauritania east to western Uganda and the White Nile in southern Sudan.

P.k. parvirostris - ranges from the Sennar District, Sudan, east through northern Ethiopia to north-western Somalia.

P.k. borealis - occurs in Afghanistan, Pakistan, throughout northern India north of Lat. 20°N up to the Himalayan foothills, and from Nepal through to central Burma.

P.k. manillensis - inhabits Sri Lanka, Rameswaram Island and the Indian Peninsula south of Latitude 20°N.

The rose-ringed parakeet is a medium-sized (40 cm) bird with bright green plumage. About half the length is the long tail. The tail feathers are quite often colored a greenish-blue. The male has a distinctive black collar extending from the throat and below the cheeks where it turns into a rose-colored ring around the hind neck. Females are similarly colored but lack the black throat collar as well as the rose-colored ring on the neck. The upper mandible of the beak is red and the lower one is blackish (Fig. 1).

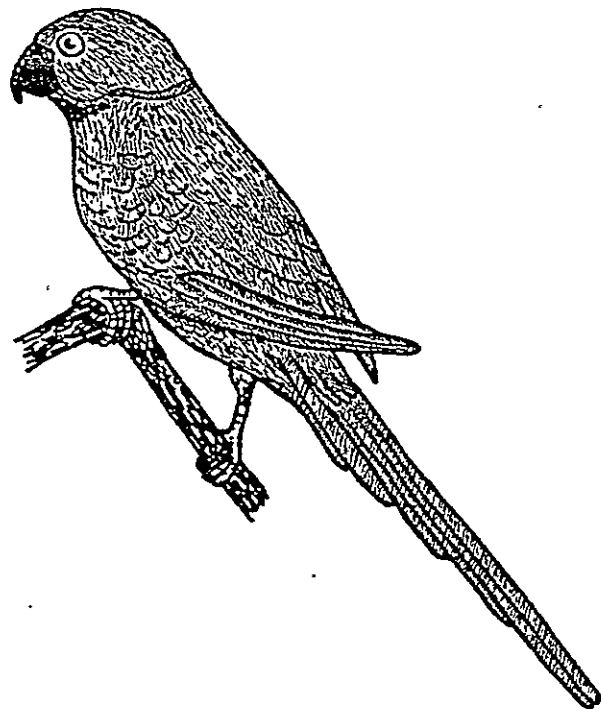


Fig. 1. Rose-ringed parakeet

Parakeets are beautifully adapted for climbing about in trees, with two toes pointing forward and two behind. They

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sometimes visit the ground, walking along with a rolling gait on their short legs. The flight is swift and direct, with rapid wing beats, the long tail streaming behind. They give a sharp call both in flight and when on a perch.

Distribution and Habitat

Rose-ringed parakeets are distributed over two continents - Asia and Africa (Fig. 2). In Asia they are found in India, to Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west, into central Nepal in the north, and east to central Burma. In Africa they are found in a wide belt from Senegal to the coast of Ethiopia.

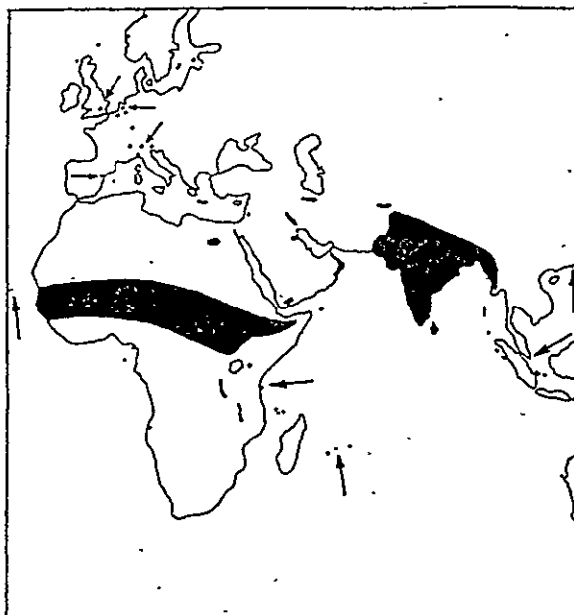


Fig. 2. Distribution of the rose-ringed parakeet.

This extensive distribution covers a wide range of habitats - parks in cities, deciduous forests, sparse groves, etc. Although they live mainly in plains, they have been seen in Kabul and Nairobi at elevations of 1600 to 1700 meters.

In India and Africa, rose-ringed parakeets are common inhabitants of deciduous woodland, light secondary jungle, semi-desert scrubland, and in gardens, orchards and cultivated farmlands. They are extraordinarily plentiful around larger cities, such as Faisalabad, Lahore, Kanpur and New Delhi.

Many parakeets have escaped their cages and today they are regarded as feral birds in many places. They have been introduced into Mauritius, Zanzibar, Egypt, Aden and Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Hong Kong and Macao, and Singapore. There is an early record from the Cape Verde Islands and unconfirmed reports from south-eastern China, VietNam and Lebanon.

They now are found in many countries in Europe including England, Scotland, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Spain, Italy and Yugoslavia. Their introduction into Africa has taken them into East Africa and as far South as the Transvaal.

In North America, they have been noted in New York, southern California and South-east Florida. They have bred successfully in the Hawaiian Islands.

Foods and Feeding

Parakeets are exclusively vegetarian, feeding on fruits, nuts, grains, seeds and flowers. They eat citrus fruit, guava, mango, green unripe pecan and almond nuts, acacia pods, acorns, as well as buds and flowers.

Parakeets are very destructive to maize, wheat, sunflower, sorghum and other grain crops and to soft fruits, such as guava, mango, orange and loquat. In general, parakeets are wasteful feeders, often dropping or discarding partially consumed foods. These birds are thus serious agricultural pests.

Feeding entails a method of using one foot to bring the food up to the beak while the other foot steadies the bird. Large fruits, such as oranges and guavas, which cannot be held with the foot because of their size, are eaten on the tree by clinging to the branch with both feet and leaving the core of the fruit on the stem.

Communal Roosting

Parakeets are gregarious, living in flocks most of the year except for the breeding season, when they live in pairs. They roost together in noisy, communal flocks, usually in a large grove of tall trees in the older parts of cities and towns. Quite often they are joined by large numbers of house crows and common mynas. They start arriving at the roost in the hour before sunset.

The parakeets feed in flocks. Leaving the communal roosts early in the morning, they are known to fly 10 to 20 km away in search of fields and orchards in which to feed. The main feedings take place in early to mid-morning and again from mid-afternoon until dusk.

Breeding and Nesting

Ring-necked parakeets have a fairly long nesting season in Asia, from January, when pre-nesting and mating activities takes place, to the end of July, when the fledglings leave the nest. In Africa they nest from August to November.

Parakeets prefer to nest in holes - preferably in rotten or hollow trees or any other cavity in the tree trunk. If the tree hole opening is too small, the female uses her beak and feet to widen and prepare the nest, often using the discarded wood chips as part of the nest material.

Parakeets are monogamous, pairing for life. This connection between the pair also holds during the non-breeding season. The existence of small flocks, in which pairs as well as individuals participate, makes it difficult to identify the pairs.

Courtship displays take place at mid-winter - December into January. Displays include stretching and bowing of legs and breast, serving food beak to beak by the male to the female, and mutual allopreening. Sometimes courtship and mating may last for over a month or more. Copulation lasts 1 to 4 minutes, both birds remaining silent.

While the female prepares the nest throughout the courtship and mating process, her mate gathers food and feeds her. This division of labor continues until the nestlings appear at the nest entrance. Nesting parakeets gradually slacken their connection with the flock, which continues its routine of common feeding and flights to and from the roosting site. The breeding male still joins his flock in the evening flights to the roosting trees.

The normal clutch size is 3 to 6 eggs. It is the female mainly that sits on the eggs. The average incubation time is 22 to 24 days. The male continues to gather food, calling the female to come and eat, which she does by emerging from the nest to a nearby branch and eats the food served to her beak to beak.

The nestlings emerge naked; their beaks are yellow, turning red gradually. The young are blind; the eyes open on the 9th day and the first feathers appear at 15 days. Within two more weeks they are fully feathered except for the rump area. A drastic change in nestling life occurs after the 5th week, when they begin to look out the entrance hole. By loudly calling for food the location of the nest is revealed to potential predators, forcing the parents to exercise special care and watchfulness and to step up food gathering. By now the female also brings in food and the male spends the night near the nest.

Nestlings at the nest opening are seen for about 2 weeks - longer if there are more young birds. At the age of 8 weeks, the fledglings leave the nest for food. From then on it is the male that mainly cares for them. During the next week the young birds are hidden among broad leaves in trees so that they cannot be seen - only heard. Parents coming to feed their young also disclose their hiding places.

The young try to follow the parent as it flies off. These first flights are clumsy and the young birds have trouble landing. It is at this stage that they are most vulnerable. Within a short time, however, the fledglings gain proficiency in flying and in eating by holding their food in one foot. In their third week outside the nest, the young parakeets are already quick flyers. Another week and they are eating by themselves and join the flock in its flight to the roosting site.

Nesting success is not high; only about 44 to 70% of all eggs laid ended up as fledgling birds. Despite these reproductive shortcomings, the birds are remarkably successful as economic pests within their original ancestral range.

Pest Status

Since they are such noted pest birds of agriculture in their original home in the Indian subcontinent, they pose a potential threat of doing the same or worse in the newer habitats where they have become established as a feral species. Although they are vegetarian, their feeding habits cover a broad spectrum of fruits, grains, oilseeds and nuts.

In reviewing the literature available on such a well-known pest bird, one is struck by the paucity of good studies on its breeding biology, food habits, population dynamics, range of movements and general ecological requirements. Very little information is available on the pharmacology and toxicity of common bird control materials against this species. Most studies and documentation of crop damage caused by this species have been done in India and Pakistan. The entire world literature on their biology, agricultural importance and methods of controlling their damage to field and orchard crops comprises only a little over 200 or so papers. These have been gathered here as a preliminary research bibliography.

This database was compiled in part from computer literature searches carried out by the library staff at the Denver Wildlife Research Center, Denver, Colorado, USA. The computer databases of BIOSIS (1969-1988), AGRICOLA (1970-1988), AGRIS International (1974-1987), The Zoological Record database (1978-1986), and the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux Abstracts (1984-1988) were searched. Some references were found in *Wildlife Review* and *Wildlife Abstracts* and others were taken from parakeet papers and books published on parrots and parakeets. We acknowledge the help provided by the DWRC library staff in compiling this bibliography.

This study was supported financially by the U. S. Agency for International Development under the Project "Food Security Management, Vertebrate Pest Control Project, PASA IPK-0491-P-IF-5017-04". We appreciate the support of the National Agricultural Research Centre, Islamabad, and the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, for providing laboratory and office space at NARC.

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